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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 TOKYO 000343

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SUBJECT: FM NAKASONE DISCUSSES AFGHANISTAN, DPRK, PIRACY IN
SEOUL

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Classified By: CDA James P. Zumwalt, reasons 1.4(b),(d).

11. (C) Summary: Bilateral cooperation on Afghanistan reconstruction and better coordination on DPRK issues dominated the discussion during FM Nakasone's meetings with ROK President Lee and FM Yu in Seoul February 10-11. Other key issues included efforts to combat piracy off the Horn of Africa, ways to strengthen trade relations, and approaches to the global economic crisis. Nakasone's visit was the latest in a series of high-level reciprocal visits aimed at fostering a more "future oriented and mature partnership" between Japan and South Korea. Media speculate that this most recent trip, however, may also have had something to do with coordinating views in advance of the Secretary's trip to the region. Preliminary indications from Nakasone's meetings give some indication that the two countries continue to move closer to one another on certain key policy issues, including the DPRK. End Summary.

Relations Steadily Improving

12. (C) Foreign Minister Hirofumi Nakasone traveled to Seoul February 10-11, meeting with President Lee Myung-bak, Foreign Minister Yu Myung-hwan, parliamentarians, business leaders, and students. The visit followed on a Prime Minister Taro Aso's trip to Seoul on January 12. Some Japanese media have speculated that the real reason for the visit was to coordinate policy views in advance of a visit to the region by U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton. True or not, this is merely the most recent in a series of high-level bilateral discussions between the two neighbors since the election of ROK President Lee Myung-bak last year. Leaders on both sides have cited the need to pursue a more "future-oriented and mature partnership," and point to frequent reciprocal visits as one way to demonstrate a continuing commitment to strengthening the bilateral relationship and working more cooperatively on regional and global issues. Lee and Yu pledged reciprocal visits at an appropriate time.

13. (C) Media analysis noted that Tokyo and Seoul have continued to move gradually "from foes to partners," with a focus on a more "future-oriented" partnership. They attribute the improvement to recognition that there are "common interests in boosting their global presence and securing their alliances with the new U.S. administration."

In his statement to reporters, FM Yu emphasized "shared values" and "deep cultural understanding," saying that the two countries could "create synergy by cooperating and capitalizing on our respective strong points." As with the Aso-Lee meeting, the two foreign ministers mostly avoided discussion of sensitive territorial and historical issues, with only one question from Yu on the schedule for Japan's annual review of textbook guidelines. "Of course there are still difficult issues," a MOFA diplomat was quoted in one press report, "but I think the two countries now recognize each other as a very important partner in the international arena."

Proceeding on Joint Assistance to Afghanistan

14. (C) Following up on the Aso-Lee meeting last month, FM Nakasone and FM Yu ironed out additional details on plans to provide joint assistance for Afghanistan reconstruction, including the dispatch of Japanese experts to a South Korean vocational training center in Kabul and joint support for an NGO-sponsored soybean project. Japan and Korea have promoted cooperation on agricultural development and vocational training for Afghanistan as a first step on the road to providing joint development assistance worldwide. Reports noted that Japan had more to share in the way of civilian expertise and financial resources, while Korea enjoys an advantage in its ability to dispatch military forces.

Moving Closer on DPRK Policy

15. (C) Referring to indications of a new missile test and

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heightened rhetoric from Pyongyang, the two foreign ministers accused the DPRK of "intentional acts to heighten tensions," and called on the DPRK regime to "behave in a way that would contribute to the region's stability." Yu reportedly characterized the recent DPRK moves as intended to split the United States, South Korea, and Japan. FM Nakasone and FM Yu reportedly discussed ways to reinvigorate the Six-Party Talks, and pledged continued cooperation with the United States in support of the process. At the same time, media noted that Japan, driven by the abductions issue, and South Korea, driven by domestic political pressures, now share an interest in making sure that the Obama Administration does not move too quickly in pursuit of verification, without taking a more comprehensive look at all of the related issues.

16. (C) President Lee reiterated his support for resolution of the abductions issue, and FM Yu promised FM Nakasone that a meeting between Japanese abductee support groups and a former DPRK agent would be arranged "before long." Media described FM Yu's willingness to discuss openly Seoul's help in organizing such a meeting as a significant departure from the South's previous policy of avoiding confrontation with the North. Some reports speculated that this could be a sign that the two countries are moving closer in their positions on the abductions issue.

Piracy, Trade, Environment, Exchanges Also Discussed

17. (C) FM Nakasone and FM Yu exchanged views on antipiracy operations off the Horn of Africa, and discussed cooperation in the form of coordinating escort operations and exchanging information regarding their respective vessels. They also promised to cooperate toward a successful outcome for the next G-20 financial meeting, scheduled to take place on April 2, in London. In keeping with that goal, they agreed to upgrade stalled negotiations on a free trade agreement to the deputy director general level, emphasizing the need for closer economic cooperation in the current troubled economic

climate. Closer to home, they vowed to increase cooperation on environmental issues, such as a reduction in marine litter and better management of fisheries resources in neighboring waters. FM Yu also accepted FM Nakasone's proposal to extend for 10 years a Japanese program that will allow 1,000 South Korean students to study science and engineering at Japanese universities.

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